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Talk Delivered by The Honorable Everett M. Dirksen, Member of the House of Representatives from the State of Illinois, at the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Honor Awards Ceremony, May 17, 1948.

Reserve

(A rainstorm threatened and finally poured down on the assembly, which explains Mr. Dirksen's introductory paragraph.)

Mr. Chairman, and all the distinguished folks that grace the speaker's table, and ladies and gentlemen: I presume at the outset, folks, we ought to make a little bargain. I am confident that we are willing to get wet up here if you are willing to get wet down there. Now I know what happens when the first burst of rain comes: There is a great surge, and I don't blame you a bit. But this is a rather significant and historic occasion, and so I hope you will not mar the ceremony this afternoon, notwithstanding the impending difficulties above. So let us regard that now as a firm bargain. When the first raindrops strike, curb that momentary fear of getting wet, stay in your place, and we shall all have a good wet time together.

It is delightful indeed to come into this fellowship this afternoon and to participate in awards for distinguished service bureaus and the individuals. Let me make this observation at the outset. It is a rather tragic habit of mind that has seized, I think, upon the country in this day and age, due partly to the acceleration of modern life, and to the fact that we somehow take things for granted. It has become a very subtle and very deep and abiding habit of mind. Obviously it disregards our sense of wonderment and naivete; very obviously it reduces the stature and the drama of those commonplace things that I call the victories of peace. John Milton once observed that the victories of peace are no less renowned than the victories of war; and while they do not receive the acclaim and the headlines, the press releases, and all that sort of thing, yet measured by every yardstick, and from the standpoint of human welfare, they are not only as important as but probably more important than the victories of war.

Now as I think of taking things for granted in this rather accelerated age, I think also of the miracle of electricity and the intricacies of our mass production system. It has provided so many benefits in this free atmosphere that have expanded the great American dream. I think of the beauties of these dainty wristwatches that women wear, of electric toasters, of alarm clocks that strike on time and get you out of bed, of streetcars that run on time and get you to work in the morning; all those things we take for granted as a part of this rather interesting and high-powered civilization of ours. We do this in every field, and it is a tragedy, because somehow it muddles our sense of appreciation. But when you think of all these advances on the peaceful front, the victories of the commonplace, behind them all, of course, are coordinated effort, teamwork on the part of people in bureaus, and the devotions and loyalties of men and women as individuals unacclaimed and unheralded -- except that they become the beneficiaries of the unsung acclaim of millions who have enjoyed those benefits.

I think right now of the Middle West. Those dainty green tendrils of corn are already coming above the earth and pretty soon farmers will be plowing, and in another 60 days it will have attained vigor and a dull, lush green color. Then it will give promise of billions of bushels that will provide food in abundance for people not only in this country but elsewhere. As a guess I would say that probably two-thirds of all of the corn that will be planted in the commercial Corn Belt will consist of hybrid seed. It is a testimony, of course, that through genetics and breeding, through the devoted and loyal effort that has been made in the Department of Agriculture, we can produce so much more corn on fewer acres to take care of the needs, not only of our own country, but of people in starving and undernourished lands in all the corners of the earth. It stands as a rich and eloquent testimony, not only to teamwork, but to individual loyalty down in the bureaus of the Department of Agriculture.

In the fall of 1945, I was flying over the Holy Land and Mesopotamia, that land that is embraced within the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, the very name of which means "the land between two rivers." There I had an opportunity to observe what has happened to the fertile topsoil of these countries that were once so notable and had such historic places in the annals of antiquity. I remember particularly in Iran and Iraq, the leaching, the erosion, the wind erosion, the lack of cultivation, the lack of scientific treatment, so that today countries that once nourished 15,000,000 people can make room for no more than 3,000,000, and even those 3,000,000 hold a rather tenuous and narrow subsistence line.

It is the very fact that nothing was done there in the field of conservation and restoration of soil. But in every one of the 48 States of the Union today there is a progressive effort that will preserve and restore this natural resource, so that in the decades ahead when the population of the United States will probably go to 170 or 180 million people, and with hungry folks in all corners of the earth who will be looking to this land of bounty and abundance, we will know that that resource is intact. It will be intact because of the splendid devotion with which that work has been carried on in this vast structure just a stone's throw from here, the United States Department of Agriculture.

I presume this noon on 30 or 40 million tables in the United States there was fresh milk and fresh cream. I used to hear the soldier's in all corners of the earth saying they'd surrender a month's pay for a glass of fresh milk. Was it because no cows were available that milk could not be obtained? That wasn't it at all, because you find cows in all corners of the earth, but it was the fact that none of our soldiers could very well and fearlessly drink or cook the refreshing milk because of the dangers of tuberculosis and undulant fever, and all those other viruses and bacilli that inhabit milk in so many corners of the earth.

Here we pay testimony today, for instance, to the progressive and vigorous program that has been carried on in this country for a long time through demonstrations, through herd-testing, so that the milk that goes upon the American table is pure and fresh, and a billion milk bottles testify to the competition in keeping this rich and wholesome fluid fresh and pure for hundreds of millions of American people. The very fact of this achievement stands as eloquent tribute to the quiet, undramatic, and devoted work done in the Department of Agriculture.

Not so long ago we had one of these ceremonial occasions in Peoria, when the Northern Regional Research Laboratory became the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award for its findings in developing penicillin to the point where, through commercial deep-vat culture, we have built up a 100 million-dollar industry in the country so that soldiers and civilians alike, our enemies as well, can testify with their lives to the work that was done in the Northern Regional Research Laboratory. There you have another evidence of devoted and loyal service that has brought such a rich benefit to mankind everywhere.

And there is another field that should not be overlooked. That is the field of Government administration. I say this because of my admiration and affection and high respect for a member of the Department, your Budget Officer, William Jump, whom I have known for the last dozen years, and whom I regard as the best budget officer in the Government of the United States. (Applause.)

There are so many folks who become a part of the Federal structure. Its very immensity and its prolixity finally licks them and they develop a sense of frustration and defeatism. The more redoubtable souls, however, recognize that a Government so vast, with such a variety of interests, must run upon the firm, iron rails of administrative procedure. Forthwith they address their talents, their energies, and their efforts to perfecting, modifying, and improving those standards so that the Government can function more efficiently and carry on its indispensable services to every man, woman, and child in the United States of America. It is a tremendous field, and I am glad to see that among those who are honored from time to time are those who have given of their talents and time to this whole field of administrative procedure. So all of you operating as individuals, groups, and teams, I salute you for the work that has been done.

But let us not forget those individuals whose names appear in the program today, and very particularly those who will be the recipients of a 40-year Service Award. What a testimony to steadfastness of purpose in an age when mobility of population is the rule rather than the exception, that people should labor in the same job for a period of four decades! It is indeed a testimony to spiritual and moral steadfastness, and I salute them everyone. It should serve, it seems to me, as an incentive for all others in Government to carry on, so that the beneficencies of the greatest enterprise on the face of the earth, the Government of the United States, may move on more efficiently and disburse its indispensable services to the enrichment of our country and of the entire world.

What a privilege and what a pleasure it is to participate in this proceeding today! I salute you one and all, and I leave you this one thought. Every so often I develop a kind of spiritual wince when I hear the word "bureaucrat" used. What a tragedy it is that, in a moment of political testimony and in the heat and fervor of the political campaign, some individuals should so freely and so indiscriminately assail what they call the bureaucracy in government. Obviously it is an all-inclusive term, and yet there are hundreds of thousands of fine, willing, loyal, and devoted people to whom that term would be a positive reproach.

That would be particularly true of those of long service if they were employed in American industry today. For every decade, and for 40 years and 50 years of service they would be richly and handsomely rewarded by private industry. In Government they are too often the target for a slur or an epithet. I hope you will not take it too seriously and realize that it is one of those things that slips in the fervor of a campaign, but if your detractors insist, then I must address you as fellow bureaucrats and salute you one and all.

Carry on in the interest of our common country and the glory of a great Republic where the atmosphere of freedom is still intact! I am glad to be a part of this program today. Thank you. (Applause)